



COMMANDER, FOURTEENTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96850

23 December 2005

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Dear Ms. Wilhelm,

It was a pleasure to accompany you on the trip to Midway last week. What a rewarding experience! It was exciting to see so many representatives of various government and private organizations working together to preserve our natural and historic heritage in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

I had made a trip to Midway previously; but that very brief visit was focused logistics issues. This time, with a full day to absorb the magnificence of the natural environment, particularly with the albatross present, I gained a much better understanding of the challenges of preserving this unique ecosystem.

I would like to highlight the importance of continued Coast Guard access to the base at Midway to carry out our missions in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and the North Pacific Ocean. I have enclosed a current issue paper on this subject.

As you know, the Coast Guard will have a significant role in enforcing the future regulations that will govern the proposed Sanctuary. As the Sanctuary proposal moves ahead, there is a need for a simple regulatory scheme that is both explainable to the public and straightforward with regard to enforcement.

Thanks again for lending me an extra rash-guard for the snorkeling trip. The water at Midway was quite a bit cooler than here in Oahu. Your thoughtfulness made my swim much more enjoyable.

Thank you for your work in support of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve and the proposed National Marine Sanctuary.

Please accept my best wishes for a happy holiday season and a great New Year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "C. D. Wurster", is written over a horizontal line.

C. D. Wurster  
Rear Admiral, U. S. Coast Guard

Enclosure

Ms. Aulani Wilhelm  
Acting Coordinator  
NWHI Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve  
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## D14 ISSUE: MIDWAY ATOLL

**Issue:** Continued Viability of Midway Atoll Airfield and Port Facilities Critical to Coast Guard Operations in North Central Pacific

**Background:** The successful completion of a variety of Coast Guard missions in the North Pacific relies on the use of Midway Island facilities in support of ships and aircraft operations. On average the Coast Guard prosecutes 12 SAR/Medevac cases annually utilizing the airfield on Midway as both a rendezvous location to expedite medical evacuation of injured/sick mariners to appropriate medical care or as a refueling/staging point to prosecute SAR missions in the NW portion of the Fourteenth Coast Guard District's vast AOR. A Coast Guard C-130 aircraft dispatched from Barbers Point Air Station takes approximately four hours to reach Midway. Without an airfield and adequate fuel supply on Midway, the persons assisted would have to transit by boat to the next closest airfield (usually Wake or the main Hawaiian Islands) for assistance. Transits would range from 4 to 8 additional days, likely resulting in death or permanent disability for the patients.

Midway is also used as a deployment site/staging area for cutters (WPB, WLB and WHEC) and aircraft (C-130) for maritime surveillance and response to law enforcement cases, including High Seas Driftnet fishing (HSDN). Located 1,200 miles from Barber's Point, Midway greatly extends the reach of the limited Coast Guard resources in Hawaii. The Coast Guard recently gained international recognition while working cooperatively with the governments of China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and Canada enforcing the U.N. moratorium on High Seas Driftnet fishing. This mission would have been nearly impossible without Midway as a staging point for aircraft surveillance flights. On average, the Coast Guard spends about a week each summer deploying fixed wing aircraft out of Midway Atoll against this threat. Having Midway available for refueling also allows CG cutters to remain in the high threat area longer, thereby increasing their deterrent effect. There is a year-round need for the airfield, aircraft and cutter fuel to accomplish our Search and Rescue (SAR), Living Marine Resources (LMR) enforcement, Marine Environmental Protection (MEP), Alien Migrant Interdiction Operations (AMIO), and Counter Drug (CD) missions. Coast Guard C-130's and a Coast Guard buoy tender staging out of Midway provided critical logistics, pollution overflight and search and rescue support this summer when the M/V CASITAS grounded at Pearl and Hermes reef. Over a three week period the Coast Guard was involved in efforts that saw the personnel onboard rescued and the pollution threat eliminated; again demonstrating the critical need for Midway airport and port facilities for contingency missions.

Approximately 10,000 gallons of fuel are required to refuel a Coast Guard C-130 aircraft. Coast Guard C-130 aircraft usually only need to refuel at Midway for extended operations, and usually do not need to take fuel at Midway on a simple round-trip transit. Coast Guard cutters refuel at Midway on a less frequent basis. Coast Guard aircraft and cutters sometimes provide logistics assistance to the USF&WS contingent on Midway on a space available basis.

The Navy relinquished control of Midway Atoll as a result of the decisions of the 1991 Base Realignment Committee. Jurisdiction was transferred to F&WS in 1996 as a wildlife refuge under the Migratory Bird Act. The atoll had already been established as the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge through a cooperative agreement between USF&WS and the Navy in 1988. Stakeholders of the aviation facilities include Boeing Corporation and commercial airlines that operate trans-Pacific wide-body airliners, the Coast Guard and the Department of Defense. The airfield is currently certified for Part 139 Airline Service, which requires a divert airfield within 1000 miles of all points along the route. Although commercial airliners do not normally utilize Midway as a refueling stop any longer, aircraft using a great circle route from Asia to the west coast of the United States rely on Midway to provide a divert alternative for a significant portion of the transit. This allows a fuel cost saving on each flight because it reduces the length of the route and the amount of reserve fuel required in case of emergencies. Department of Defense aircraft apparently use the facilities as a matter of convenience and it is not considered a strategically important location.

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The Coast Guard maintains fixed and floating aids to navigation in Midway Atoll, primarily to support vessel visits for logistics support and medical evacuation missions, and typically a Honolulu based Coast Guard buoy tender visits Midway on an annual basis in support of this mission.

**Current Status:** In August 2005, a Congressional Staff delegation visited Midway via a CG HC-130. The visit emphasized the strategic importance of this facility to a plethora of national/federal agencies. The delegation members represented DHS Appropriations Committee, Fisheries and CG subcommittees, and HLS & Governmental Affairs subcommittees as well as legislative assistants to Senators DeWine and Stevens. As a result of this visit, Mr. Terry Sauvain, the Minority Staff Director of the Appropriations Committee, suggested that the F&WS put together a funding/staffing request for what they need to operate the facility at a level that includes all planned operations/users.

The Coast Guard continues to work closely with all of the stakeholders regarding the Northwest Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve and the proposed change to Marine Sanctuary status, to ensure that enforceability of federal regulations by the Coast Guard is considered in any potential management schemes. Again the airfield and port facilities at Midway will be of strategic value to the Coast Guard in this regard, to help protect this unique ecosystem.

**Discussion:** We are very pleased to hear that the DOI/USF&WS have recently reached an agreement with the FAA, and the FAA intends to provide continued funding to operate and maintain the airport at Midway Atoll through FY-06. We view the facility at Midway as critical to our mission success in that part of our AOR. The Coast Guard continues to have a cooperative relationship with the Fish and Wildlife service when operating out of Midway Atoll, and is working closely with Fish and Wildlife Service counterparts to ensure that Coast Guard operational needs are included in the current initiative to right-size the facilities at Midway.

**Date Revised:** 21 Dec 2005

Point of Contact: LCDR Jeff Janszen, D14(drm), 808-541-2312
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